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ABSTRACT

Various definitions of culture are examined with respect to their possible implications concerning the study of Chinese culture through literary analysis. Observing the difficulty of direct Chinese culture study, the author suggests that Chinese majors consider literary sources as a valid means of interpreting Chinese culture. Some 11 sets of literary works, including several poems and a play, are discussed, illustrating how the culture of a nation is reflected through its literature. (RL)

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CHINESE CULTURE THROUGH STORIES AND OTHER LITERARY WORKS

by

K. Y. Hsu

On April 19, 1971, President Chiang Kai-shek of the Republic of China was interviewed by an American correspondent representing CBS in Taipei. To the question whether the current situation between the Republic of China and Communist China would long remain stalemated, Chiang Kai-shek answered, "The current situation between the Republic of China and the Communist bandits cannot long endure because the Communist bandits are rebels opposing the tradition of our nation and consistently enslaving our people on the mainland. By now our people on the mainland have been persecuted and have reached a point beyond their endurance. They are eagerly awaiting our government to retake the mainland in order that our Chinese tradition could be restored.... Therefore the puppet Communist bandit regime certainly cannot long exist."

The point about the mainland Chinese being enslaved is accepted by some as a point of fact, while denied by others as oversimplification. But this is a point for political observers to observe and political analysts to analyze. What interests us here is the premise asserted by Ching Kai-shek: the Chinese people yearn to return to their tradition. Without going into the complex question about what constitutes the Chinese national tradition, Ching Kai-shek as spokesman for whatever percentage of the total Chinese population, here reveals one aspect of the Chinese mentality, and a very important aspect at that, particularly for us, students of cultures, because it yields for our benefit much cultural insight and offers us much cultural information.

(Editor's note: This article had been written for the Hawaii PEN Center and the Asian and Pacific Languages Department's public lecture delivered on May 7, 1971)

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Chiang Kai-shek is a lofty statesman whose life and experience mirror much of modern Chinese history. What he says is expected to reflect significant if not unique Chinese viewpoints. But we do not have to turn to a man of his position to learn about Chinese culture. We all know that the common Chinese greeting, "Have you eaten your meal?" indicates something important in the life of those people brought up in that culture. We all know that the traditional Chinese way of saluting by holding one's two hands together instead of shaking the other person's hand tells us much about the traditional Chinese view against bodily contact in public. (And how well we know this: as late as 1968 two American students were dismissed from a Taipei college because they had been observed kissing in the corridor of the dormitory.) To a discerning observer every word uttered is a carrier of information about the speaker's culture, so is every gesture he exercises, and so is the silence he maintains. For what could be more eloquent in speaking about the traditional Chinese view on and pattern of education than the silence respectfully maintained by a schoolboy in classroom?

I believe the point is made without further illustrations, without trying to involve such forms of cultural expressions as the theatre, the poetry, the philosophy and fine arts of a people. For these forms of expressions, sometimes referred to as higher or more sublimated forms of expressions, are but combinations of man's most basic expressions: the sounds and sights, either real or imaginary, created by him to describe an experience however subtle or shocking, to entertain or educate or both.

I believe the point has been made already about what culture is. Clearly culture involves more than the higher expressions of a culture. No matter how great a poem is, a reader's response to it can't be but based on his cumulative life experience, and his life experience cannot be realized without his perceptions, through his senses and his mind, and his reactions and responses to these perceptions. A cultivated Chinese reader sees real beauty in Wang Wei's poetry about mountains and waterfalls because in the reader's life experience there have been accumulated the same ingredients of the same beauty. Without the latter ingredients he cannot truly appreciate Wang Wei's poetry. A sensitive American youth of the 1970s is swayed and swept off his feet by Richard Brautigan's words which bring them unparaphrased sensations and unbridled rhythms because the American youth has been experiencing in his life the sensations and rhythms of the 1970s. In order to understand what a Chinese sees in a Wang Wei poem we have to know how he behaves in front of that poem, which involves our understanding of the Chinese reader's behavior in all its facets and aspects. It

is so with poetry, one of the highest forms of cultural expressions, and it is equally so with the pattern of politics, as with the family festivals, as with daily doldrum.

Now, if you wish to have a summary of these thoughts on Culture restated in the form of a definition before we proceed to examine its ramifications, there are quite a few choices. The one which seems to sum up what I have said so far most succinctly is offered by anthropologists Kluckholm and Kelly (as quoted by Lado) who said that culture is "all those historically created designs for living explicit and implicit, rational, irrational, and non-rational, which exist at any given time as potential guides for the behavior of men." Translated back onto my own words, to fit the subject of this talk, Chinese culture means all the ideas and concepts inculcated in the Chinese people of which they may or may not be conscious, but by which they think, feel, act and react.

Already we are brought face to face with the enormity and complexity of the subject matter. Vertically the historically created Chinese conceptual designs span how many years? Shall we say 2500 years since Confucius? Or 3500 years since the dawning of Chinese written history? And what about pre-historical Chinese experiences? Can we ignore the pre-historical red-burial practice (i.e., burying the dead in red clay) when we study the Chinese attitude toward the red color developed in later centuries? Can we ignore the pre-historical prototypes of the dragon symbol when we examine the a-moral character of the Chinese concept of power that affected the Chinese way of life and continues to reign in many areas of Chinese behavior? Much of the meaning of a language has survived a long passage of time, but time necessarily has seen much change in the meaning also. The word ai-ren (lover, or sweetheart) appeared in late 19th century Chinese vocabulary with a sweet, sentimental connotation not unlike the examples found in the novels of Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters. The same word is still in current use in mainland Chinese literature but with a connotation much less precious and cute than 50 years before. We certainly cannot afford to overlook such temporal changes in the meaning of a word and the concept behind it.

And then horizontally the designs guiding the Chinese behavior encompass how many people? 450 million? 650 million? Or the more recent figure, 800 million? Whatever size the Chinese population has reached now, it is spread out over quite an area. A village woman in Shensi (north China) has no trouble understanding the Szechwan (West China) Mandarin, but she cannot stand

it if a Szechwan farmer asks her to lend him a ban-dz (板子, a piece of lumber, a board) because the same word in her village also means the female sex organ. When we pause to ponder on the variations of responses these 800 million people may have toward their historically created behavioral designs, we are just about ready to give up trying to understand Chinese culture with any sense of accuracy and completeness.

And yet we can't give up; we couldn't even if we tried. For we are actually studying some aspects of some culture or cultures regardless of what intellectual and academic line we have chosen to pursue. Those concentrating on Chinese government and politics, or philosophy, or art, or patterns of peasant life, are each studying some aspects of Chinese culture with their own methodologies. He who studies the Chinese language makes no exception. Indeed he is more directly involved in the study of Chinese culture than many other fields because each Chinese word or expression he learns denotes either a form of a Chinese cultural phenomenon, or a Chinese cultural process, or a Chinese cultural value. While some of these denotations and even connotations may be universal, others are necessarily Chinese and exclusively Chinese. For example, the Chinese word fàn (cooked rice, a meal) denotes a phenomenon not exclusively Chinese: cooked rice served in a meal is featured in many other cultures. But what fàn connotes in Chinese culture as an overwhelmingly popular staple is uniquely Chinese. The expression dzwò-fàn (to cook rice or prepare a meal) denotes a rather universal cultural process, but who cooks meals and when and how, which this Chinese expression connotes, is uniquely Chinese. The fact that even in Taiwan today the hostess, regardless of how many maidservants and cooks she may have, still stays in the kitchen to supervise the cooking during a dinner party, is very much Chinese. The expression chī-fàn (eat rice or meal) may denote something the value of which is universally understood; who doesn't want to eat when hungry? And yet the connotation of chī-fàn in Chinese in such an expression as Nín chīle fàn meiyou? (Have you had your dinner or lunch or breakfast?) suggests a unique Chinese value placed on the action of eating one's meals. And what about fàn-tǔng (rice bucket)? Such seemingly innocent cultural form in actuality carries a lethal cultural value judgement in China. If you don't believe it, you just try to apply it to your best friend and see how he instantly

turns into your worst enemy.

It is not difficult to realize, as our examples have shown, that every expression in a language is a conveyor of some information on its culture. All it requires for us to receive such cultural information while studying the language is a constant presence of certain cultural sensitivity which can be cultivated. A language student can cultivate a habit of asking a series of questions when he is confronted with a Chinese cultural phenomenon to get at what it actually means or at the many meanings it may have to a Chinese speaker in China. Armed with such a set of questions, the student can follow one of many effective methods to obtain cultural information from language; one of these is to conduct a lexical study.

The next problem is more perplexing, and that is how to organize cultural information thus obtained from language study. As we can't insure any understanding of a culture if what we've got is but chips and bits of disorganized cultural information, and as no organization can be attempted without knowing its purpose, we have to give a long thought to the ultimate purpose of our study of culture through language.

The ultimate purpose of learning anything is but enrichment and betterment of the learner's life. The ultimate purpose of learning a culture, is but to widen our horizon of experience, enable us to enjoy more what the world and humanity have to offer us, reduce problems that make our lives miserable, including wars and tensions, and all and all make us better human beings. Specifically, we want to learn Chinese culture so that we can enter into empathy with the Chinese people, to feel the way they do about the world around them, to see and understand and accept the logic they use to guide their decision-making. If we succeed in the former, we would be able to enjoy the Chinese world including their art and literature as well as the plain, simple little pleasures of life. If we succeed in the latter, we would know how to function comfortably in the Chinese world the acme of which is, of course, way beyond the amity across a ping-pong table, and the least of which would promise us a day when the domino theory is consigned to the garbage pile forever.

Our purpose guides us, but our choice of an effective approach is still restricted by our material and

physical limitations. Not many of us have the facility to live in and experience Chinese culture in China for an optimum amount of time; most of us can only devote a fraction of a four-year college career to study China with a hopeful result that even for a student with a life-long interest in China will have had a sound foundation of knowing Chinese culture by the time he leaves college. With all these needs and limitations in view, it seems important to organize our study material around a group of key concepts by which the Chinese people have lived and are continuing to live. The focus has to be maintained not on these concepts in isolation and in abstraction, for if so they may mean nothing to us or even to the Chinese themselves, but rather on the interrelationship between these concepts and their translation into actual behavior of the Chinese people.

What could be more direct and effective for a study of the interrelationship between thought and action of the Chinese people than observing the life experience of the Chinese and analyze why they act the way they do? Separate as we are from the Chinese life experience by time and space, we find the closest possibility of sharing it with the Chinese in reading, viewing, and listening to the records of it, which are Chinese stories, pictures and motion pictures, and other sound recordings. The latter two types of materials are not available for any Chinese life experience dating back to 50 years ago; but stories written on Chinese experience abound. So I turn to stories. As we read the stories, besides noting the social customs, family relationships, geography and history, we watch the real live characters emerge from the pages. There is a sharing of thoughts and feelings of the heroes and villains, and a vicarious sense of having been present, a sense of reality and immediacy.

To accomplish all I have set up for myself I have attempted to select and structure a number of stories as listed in the few pages distributed here. Let us turn to them for a moment and let me explain:

Thirty-four stories, four poems and one play have been selected and grouped into eleven sets, each under a major thematic topic, and together they fall under three general divisions, three units. The first unit, which I call "From Myth to History", presents the

principal Chinese myths about how life and its hierachy has come into being. In this unit we observe how the Chinese view the universe around them and their relation to it as well as their relation to each other human being. The very first story is the old legend about how order has been restored in a universe that appears to have always been there. This is the way the Chinese see it: There has always been a universe and the universe has its own order. Any chaos is but temporary. The supreme authority is the order of the universe itself, and man's duty is just to recognize this order and live by it. Power is a-moral, but no power can long last if it fails to uphold the universal order. To be sure this is an old legend, reflecting what the Chinese used to believe as truth. Since then the Chinese mind has changed much, but change has not erased all the vestiges of the old concepts which, like genes implanted in man, are always present and may at any time surface again no matter how many conceptual mutations the Chinese mind has been going through. Some of these mutations and adaptations are traced in the second, third, and fourth stories in the same set. "Mending the Sky" written by Lu Hsun in 1922 makes use of the same old legend, but in it the author incorporates a newer Chinese view on the power of creativity, and how failure to respect this power of creativity has led men to fabricate all sorts of artificial inequities to victimize themselves. Ywan Ko, (袁 弋) a scholarly writer wrote the third story in this set in Peking in 1960. His treatment of the same legend glorifies the power of man to maintain and develop the human world as a happy and peaceful place to live in, and the equal ability and responsibility of every man and woman to contribute to this ideal order. The last story in this set records a real life experience in the 1930s in which the author tells us of the different views on the forces that govern life and creation and how the Chinese manage to live with these conflicting views.

The second set starting with another old legend, "From Dragon to Man," introduces how the Chinese sees and accepts as the origin of social order and the authority and responsibility for social control. The king, a direct descendent from dragon, the symbol and personification of power, rules because he defends his people against all harmful forces and when he fails he is held personally responsible for any disaster. The legend gives a general but fairly complete outline

of the Chinese comcept of who governs and what the government is expected to do. The next story, "The Great Flood" by Lu Hsun satirizes the abuses that have set in among social strata and the tragic departure from the rather reasonable principle of government established in earlier days. The third one in this set is a folk ballad appearing in 1959 in mainland China, which knocks down all old beliefs in the power of gods and replacesthem with a confidence in the power of men motivated and organized to strive for their own well being. "The Wind and Wave Pavilion", the last one in this set, relates how a junior high school boy spends a day in the 1930s trying to listen to and act out the heroic legend about the Sung Dynasty patriotic general Yueh Fei, and noticing some of the incongruities between the values of old and those of his days, including how a dragon's revenge was said to be behind a foreign military invasion.

Unit Two introduces another layer of concepts which guides the Chinese way of life. Here imagined and empirical experiences continue to validate certain ideas about the right and wrong, and what is neither right nor wrong but just so as it happens. Ghosts, demons, and other spirits have long peopled the Chinese universe and have functioned either as an agent for justice, or an explanation of the unexplainable, or a vicarious fulfillment of a wish. The first one of the first set, taken from the 17th century collection of tales known as Lyau Jai, or Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio as translated by Herbert Giles, attributes power to a king of Hades who holds man accountable for his deeds, with award for kindness and punishment for greed and ill-temper. It is an important Chinese folk belief that has guided the decision making of most of the Chinese for centuries. And the idea of retribution, or Karma, continues to emerge as the central theme of a series of strange coincidences in the story by that name, written in Taipei as late as 1965. Yet in the third story, "Child for Sale", we see a tableau of an ordinary Chinese neighborhood passing a typical day without much interference by the gods and ghosts, but with its full share of human drama. Reading these stories together offers us some understanding of how the Chinese had to find something other than ghosts and spirits to serve as monitors of their morals, and they seem to have found some replacement now.

The Chinese city of gods is a parallel to the world of men, hence the good spirits and bad spirits. The good ones have to be kept on good terms and the bad ones have to be exorcised. In "Driving Away the Devil" there is an example of how the Chinese visualized the forces inherent in every object and the chain of their mutual control. A man may not succeed in acquiring magic power in himself to overcome a demon, but he can acquire a sword impregnated with magic power with which to do the job. How a sword can be endowed with supernatural power is partly revealed in the third story of this second set, "The Sword in the Shark-skin Sheath", where an unbelieving Chinese acquiesces in the use of such a magic sword because he has nothing else to turn to at a moment of crisis. The fact that the crisis is resolved after the display of the sword may reinforce the believer's faith in supernatural powers. What does it do to the unbeliever remains to be seen. It makes us wonder how the magic of Mao Tse-tung's quotations may or may not spread and persist in Communist China.

The second story of the second set, "Jung Kwei Catches a Ghost", is a straightforward debunking of superstitious beliefs in ghost.

Closely related to the idea of propriety, the idea of what should or should not be done in a given situation, is the concept of cleanliness. As shown in the story "Janitor God of a Taoist Temple," something similar to the saying "cleanliness is next to godliness" seems to be operating there. The question is what constitutes cleanliness? In cleaning up the temple, the janitor god certainly is not employing DDT or any anti-biotic detergent, and the fox fairy who has to hide does so not because he smells. The rank of cleanliness in traditional Chinese thought is parallel to the rank of godliness in that the supreme god, whatever his name, is the cleanest and the bottom rung gods are the dirtiest. It also corresponds with the hierarchy of social ethnical virtues in that the model of morality is clean while the vile villains are dirty. Or it is identified with the concept of purity, thus making the purest, the most untampered the cleanest while the most adulterated the dirtiest. In the light of the last application, no wonder the public health director in the second story has trouble trying to clean up the village. For the villagers cling to the

belief that the untampered remains clean; thus earth is clean as nature is clean, and if the chickens and pigs leave droppings in the street and the baby wets his bed and soils his pants, so what? City dwellers differ from the rustic everywhere; this may be true, but the concept of cleanliness that motivates the family in "The Glass On the Lantern" to do their annual house cleaning does not depart much from the traditional.

Equating moral superiority with cleanliness is further evidenced in the third story of the following set, the fourth set. In "The Return of the Thief" the idea that thieves are dirty has been deeply inculcated in the mind of the boy to the extent that anyone associated with a thief automatically becomes an untouchable to the boy. And yet does the act of stealing always automatically make a dirty act? Not necessarily so, as shown in the first of this fourth set, "A Thief's Luck", where the destructive force of poverty, not the thief, is the villain. And for that matter, even the act of murder is not dirty per se, since the old man in the second story, "A Stranger from Afar", kills because his reasoning faculty has been robbed by forces beyond his control.

Adventure is neither right nor wrong, neither clean nor dirty. It is an expression of man's yearning for an escape from the usual, from the approved routine assigned to him by society, or even from himself. Yet in these three stories we find ample information on what the Chinese consider to be proper behavior when and where. The adventures of the outlaws in All Men are Brothers who behave like Robin Hoods, are experienced with gusto, sometimes in gory blood, but these outlaws observe an extra-legal ethical code accepted by the Chinese as justifiable since over two thousand years ago. The story "Punishment" involves a boy who tries to conceal his Robin Hood type prowess in order to please his father. When he is driven by injustice to exercise his special talent, punishment is swift and excessive. The two boys spending one night at a roadside inn in west China in 1930s experienced a different kind of adventure. They had read too many adventure stories. While some of them must have been based on true occurences, the two boys had a hair-raising adventure only in their minds.

Unit Three examines a different set of ideals, beginning with the ideal man and his making through education. "The Scholars", an excerpt from the novel by Wu Jing-dz of the 18th century, describes and lampoons the process of cultivating and recognizing the ideal man in China which had been in operation for nearly two thousand years. The civil examination system had been the only officially sanctioned avenue of vertical social mobility. It furnished many apologists of Chinese culture something by which they could claim China to have been democratic; it made the great English philosopher of liberalism, John Stuart Mill, envious; and it certainly helped hold Chinese society together for hundreds of years. Even after the need for new substance demanded by changing times brought about its demise in the early years of the 20th century, the basic concept about man and his teachability remains the same. From "The Scholars" to "I am a Brick-layer" which is the second story, ideological change during the past two hundred years makes the Chinese accept learning from practical experience as something even more valuable than learning from books, but the importance of books has not been entirely negated. The older ideal man was a generalist who could assist the emperor to put the country in order; the newer ideal man can do things with his hand to increase, materially and physically, the well being of his fellow Chinese. What has not changed is that the ideal man can and does give himself, including his life if need be, to the cause of helping his fellow Chinese symbolized by the Chinese state. The last point is true in the 1955 story published in Peking, as is true in the 1966 story published in Taipei. Unfortunately men do not always agree on the best and only approach to serving a lofty cause, and when two approaches become mutually exclusive, the believers in each can and do go to the extreme in eliminating the other. This is what happens in "The Young Rebels." The young students in the 1930s, having been exposed enough to the national crisis as to have their sense of nationalism aroused, but not enough to know what to do about it, watch in paralyzing horror the murders in broad daylight committed in the name of the nationalists or communists.

An analysis of the Chinese ideal man has brought us to an examination of the Chinese concept of nationalism, which is the main concern of the second set of materials. Some students of China have long maintained that in

China there has been no nationalism, only culturalism. This seems to me the kind of semantic hair-splitting that really does not amount to much. True, the Chinese have always been proud of what they claim to be their culture (and after I have spent the first 10 to 15 minutes of this lecture to find out what culture is, I wonder if we are talking about the same thing.) But don't they in the same breath claim they are direct descendents of the Yellow Emperor and only they know the Chinese language, Chinese ethics, Chinese social customs, and only they are fit to occupy China, the flowering center of the earth, and only they are capable of educating the barbarians to bring culture to them? Now if that is not nationalism, or even chauvinism, what is?

Well, that was a long parenthetical note.

The Chinese perception of what their nation is, and should be, and how each Chinese should behave in order to make their nation what it should be, certainly has been a very important governor of his life-- and is getting more important each day. The late 19th century writer, Lao Tsan, or Lyou Tye-yun, lived to see disastrous consequences of the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, and the increasing truculence of the Japanese threatening China's territorial integrity, as well as the Chinese failure to get united to face their common enemy. At the beginning of his book, "The Travels of Lao Tsan," he states his concerns over the nation's crisis in a thinly disguised allegory about a sinking ship. As a solution he urges China to borrow technology from the western nations.

Lao Tsan does not downgrade the western world at all, even though he is far from a blind worshipper of western culture. A story written by a Taipei author in 1963, however, shows a kind of nationalism that is downright comical at places, and yet the story is told with a straight face. The original title of the story is "My Father," I changed it in the spirit of the Confucian rectification of names because that's really what it is all about. The father in the story is a Chinese graduate student studying physics somewhere in Wisconsin. His patriotism is satisfied with his effort to hang the Chinese flag one inch higher than the American flag during a ceremony. He writes to his daughter bragging about his thoughtfulness in that secret act because, he admitted, nobody could have possibly noticed it

except himself. He plays the Chinese national anthem each time his Chinese friends come to visit him. He stops his family from coming over to join him on the ground that family education in Taiwan is superior to what is available here. He hates his fellow Chinese students in America because they seem to aim only at getting doctoral degrees and then high-paying jobs and then settling for a materially comfortable life, in America. And yet with all his dislike of America he himself stays on, studying and earning good money at the same time.

Wen I-to's nationalism expressed in his two poems is a different kind. In "One Sentence," he sees China as a dormant volcano which any moment can erupt at the sound of the one sentence, "This is our China!" He is not saying that China is superior to the west; he merely asserts in poetic way that China must come to life and when it does, it will surprise the world with its activities, and the key to its coming to life lies with the Chinese people's awakening to their national identity. "The Laundry Song" records his experience of being treated as a Chinaman's son, which was, in the United States of the 1920s, still tantamount to being a laundryman's son and laundry was not particularly a respected trade here, much less in China.

"I Am an American" is a one-act play depicting the thought and feeling of a Chinese going through the process of naturalization to obtain his American citizenship. Some of the conflicts occurring in the mind of the main character are likely shared by most of the Chinese in a similar situation, if they think their own thoughts at all.

In a poem telling of his life-long ambition, the great (some say the greatest) poet of China, Tu Fu of the Tang Dynasty wrote, "... to place my sovereign above Yao and Shun, and then turn the social trends to the good." (致君堯舜上，更使風俗淳). Yao and Shun are the model sage-kings whose moral virtues alone, according to legends, brought about peace, harmony, and prosperity to earth. Yes, to the entire earth as the Chinese used to consider China as the center of the world and beyond China there was not much of anything anyway. Viewed in this light, we can readily see that the Chinese ideal of putting the nation

in order has been the same as putting the world in order, and to build a utopian China has been the same as building a utopian world.

What has been this utopian dream that has spurred many Chinese on in search of it? The 4th century poet T'ao Ch'ien wrote an account and a poem about his dream entitled "The Peach-blossom Spring," where men live in harmony with nature and with each other and where there are no quarrels, no sorrows, no wars, and no taxes. Almost as idyllic is the 1957 Peking story, "The Skinny Red Horse" describing the happily vigorous life in a commune in mainland China. There is competition in the commune, but only for doing more and better for the common good; and there are villains, of course, but not many and not very serious. Between the serene and the vigorous kinds of utopia, some Chinese youth in the 1940s saw their ideal dream of a society in the manner of "West China Pantisocracy." Faced with the grim reality which allowed very little if any possibility for leading a different way of life free from the entrenched but not altogether reasonable forces of control and interference, these young people talked about and some actually acted to bring about a different kind of new community. They knew some geography, and they knew where open frontier could still be found.

So far all the main themes I have used in organizing the material concern man's relation to other men. Of equal importance is man's musing about what his life really means and in what way he can see the value of his life. The identity problem is not a new one. If a man feels his own value he knows where he belongs and what his identity is. "The Governor is an Anthill", a famous old story first written down in the Tang Dynasty, contains an eloquent statement on the ephemeral and illusory nature of man's life. If a man, as the one in the story, can live a long life of fame and glory including moments of extreme sorrow and tragedy, only to realize upon awakening that he has but dozed off for an hour or so, of what use is striving for such things which the world calls success? The "Torn Leaves on the Coffee Table" brings three old friends back together to review their lives: one has been tamed by his domestic life and he is rather content with the rather dull rhythm of sticking to his routine to keep himself and his

family going; the second used to be swashbuckling, but has since been disappointed in love, and is now thinking of just going away and keep going, anywhere, just anywhere; the third wonders about which of the two, or any other pattern in between, offers any real meaning and makes any sense. The last life experience story in my book finds a Chinese boy on the eve of his departure for college, reminiscing all the important things that have occurred in his life, and wondering about the unknown future.

This is my first attempt at studying Chinese culture through stories and other literary works. I am quite aware that such an attempt is likely to fall short of completeness; there must be many other themes that should be included. Culture being such a multi-faceted thing, and life complex, perhaps no listing of its themes can be exhaustive. My first draft includes about ten more stories which have been set aside simply because of the bulk of the volume. As others who have tried out some of these sets of stories informed me and as I used them this semester in my own class, each story is a slice of life in its proper proportions, involving understandably more than one of man's concerns. The thematic topics and my brief comments on them tonight could not have said all a thoughtful student reading them will be provoked to think about.

It should also be mentioned that the stories, though separated widely in their spatial and temporal settings, are interrelated. Within each set each story comments on and illumines the others, and the points raised in each set find echoes and commentaries from the other sets. This is as it should be because life is organic and no human experience can be completely isolated from other human experiences.

In this way and with these materials, my friends, I hope to accomplish what I set out to do as described at the beginning of my talk, and if what I have observed from my students this semester is any criterion, I am emboldened to say my design is hopeful, not just wishful.

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